

## The Stigmatization of Trauma: A Reflection on Mahesh Dattani's Select Works

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### Abstract

Trauma is a response to an experience that devastates a person mentally. It frequently causes shock, denial, and changes in the body, mind, and behavior. People witness difficult circumstances and long-lasting repercussions on their psychological and physical well-being due to trauma. The chosen plays *Tara* and *30 Days in September* are examined using trauma theory. The traumatic stigma of victimized characters and their offenders are explored and brought to light in the present study. The paper maps out the common aspects of trauma in Mahesh Dattani's plays and creates a portal for scholarly reflections on the author's ideology of trauma. It attempts to explore the reason behind the abnormal behavior of the characters and argues that childhood plays a major role in shaping the behavioral attributes of the adults. The researcher has made thematic analysis on the select plays through attentive reading. The study aims to develop an in-depth understanding on the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on the characters taken for study and the possible ways to liberate from traumatic disorder. It strives to cease the stigmatization of trauma and emphasizes the fact that proper counseling, care and support will help the trauma affected characters to recover from the disorder.

**Keywords:** Trauma, traumatic narrative, child abuse, PTSD

### 1. Introduction

Research on trauma was initiated during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Trauma, according to Freud, is a psychological injury rather than a physical one [1]. Psychological trauma was the cause of women's deliriousness during the twentieth century which is when trauma studies began. In his project for *Scientific Psychology* (1895), Freud claims that 'women in their childhood were sexually exploited. Trauma has its origin in a Greek word that means' wound'. Psychological trauma is the emotional contradiction between the necessity to admit that one is not prepared for the incident and the underlying impulse to reject horrifying happenings. In trauma studies, researchers conducted research on how trauma affects people. The trauma experimented paradigm indicates that pain is not pleasant. Trauma is a rampant problem. It occurs when an individual is confronted with an event or sequence of events that are upsetting emotionally or threatening to their life and have long-lasting negative impacts on their mental, physical, social, and emotional health. Even though the fact that trauma can strike any person at any time, it has particularly long-term negative impacts on children's evolving brains. Trauma is the direct cause of mental health issues or increases the probability of developing them. Determining which issues are spurred on by trauma is sometimes complicated. An incident is deemed to be traumatic based on the personal emotional experience of it and not the factual circumstances. A person is more likely to experience trauma, become more frightened, and feel helpless among other individuals. The structure of our minds and how we perceive the world can be disturbed or altered by psychological trauma.

Traumatized adults frequently have different "wiring" than non-traumatized adults. Since their brains are wired to handle almost continual stress, they may find it difficult to react appropriately to circumstances that normally seem. This helps to explain why so many adult trauma survivors have melancholy, anxiety, and other problems. Other symptoms of trauma include nightmares, shivering, and excessive thoughts. In "*Mourning and Melancholia*"

(1917/1986: 253)," Freud mentioned loss as a wound. In this essay, he explains that "the complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies... and emptying the ego until it is impoverished". The victims find it difficult to comprehend their emotions, which change depending on their dispositions. The victims' painful experiences have a profound impact on sociocultural history. Flashbacks and trigger circumstances potentially affect the victims. Due to the flashback, the victims would feel confused and unconsciously concentrate on the horrible events from their past. The victims continuously think about these recent events for a longer time and are reminded of them frequently. In *Tara* and *30 Days in September*, the characters Tara and Mala experienced the traumatic wiring by the self-proclaimed hypocrisy of their direct family members.

The traumatizing pressure from the family members in the form of mental and child abuse was imposed on the characters Tara and Mala. These terrifying ideas about abusing children and the emotional pressure they cause have an impact on the victims later years. The women in Dattani's stories suffered from severe beatings, trauma, and abuse in the hands of their family. These incidents might not have a recurring pattern or be particularly serious, making it simple to dismiss them as unimportant. However, this could result in the rise of chronic anxiety and overactive inclinations as a means of protecting themselves from painful and traumatic encounters. Socialization and development would be impacted by traumatic experiences in childhood. Experiences of or exposure to violence, abuse, or neglect in the home can result in this kind of trauma. The neighborhood where a child is raised could also be included because it will also affect their development.

## 2. Research Objectives

The study's objectives are as follows: i. to negotiate the presence of invisible trauma issues in the narratives of Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* and *30 Days in September*. ii. To decode the abnormal behavior of characters and situations iii. to unravel the reason behind trauma faced by Mahesh Dattani's characters.

## 3. Methodology

The researcher assessed the existence of the common tropes of the traumatized characters, repetition of traumatic occurrences, symbolic components reflecting trauma in the study, and the struggles of PTSD which employs a close reading method to analyze the traumatizing narrative in the select plays of Mahesh Dattani.

In this study, which is focused on the thematic analysis of the text, the researcher emphasized the central theme through attentive reading. The researcher has investigated on the theme of trauma, identity crisis and struggle in the select plays. The researcher handled how trauma is foregrounded differently in Mahesh Dattani's works than in his literary progenitors.

### 3. Trauma in Dattani's plays *Tara* and *30 Days in September*

Trauma holds a significant part in Mahesh Dattani's plays *Tara* and the *30 Days in September*. Chronic health issues, trauma and childhood events are strongly correlated in his plays. As Herman mentioned, "The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (Herman, 1). Projection of child abuse has been a common theme in both Dattani's *Tara* and *30 Days in September*.

Dattani's drama *Tara* consists of three acts. Favoring the boy and disliking the girl is central to the play's theme, which has been created with exceptional inventiveness. The author challenges the parents' decision to favor their son above their daughter. Tara's parents gave preference to Chandan, who treated Tara poorly. Physically handicapped, Tara believed her parents will be able to respond to her. Chandan, however, received all their affection and admiration. Tara, therefore, had no interest in it and lived in her world, but soon after, she learned that Chandan was the one who was born without legs and that she had two perfectly good legs. Bharathi and Mr. Patel are at a loss for action. As a result, Mr. Patel and Barati believed that while it is useless for a girl to have flawless legs, it is essential for a boy to have legs because Chandan will eventually succeed.

Consequently, they scheduled a surgery where Tara's legs would be attached to Chandan's. Upon realizing that her family's love was dishonest and pointless, Tara experienced a sense of devastation. After knowing the truth behind Chandan and her operation, Tara developed sadness and stopped communicating with her family. Her health deteriorated as she began to experience traumatic pressure. Mr. Patel forbade Tara from learning and forced her to stay at home instead. Tara felt claustrophobic in that confined patch. She became stressed and grew depressed about the futility of her life because of loneliness and her parents' betrayal. Intelligent Tara was compelled to remain in seclusion at home. Tara distanced herself from everyone after uncovering the truth of operation.

Tara started to hold herself accountable. She was neither consoled nor made to realize the importance of her "self" in reviving from the trauma. Tara begins to encounter soul-darkening moments and wonders what the purpose of her existence is. Many behavioral abnormalities in human existence have been predominantly caused by trauma. Tara's existence in a body that undergoes every trauma response possible has left her feeling furious and ineffectual. The paradox of trauma is its twin ability to obliterate and transform. Due to her parents' emotional maltreatment, Tara

remained entangled in a vicious cycle of self-destruction. In her narrative, Tara sacrificed her role as the main character and was pushed to a small role. Most people use words or tears to vent their anguish. Conversely, a few express their grief by being funny, popular and persistent and Tara in a conversation with Chandan expresses her grief as:

“Chandan: You should. You should care- for people around you.

Tara: How do you expect me to feel anything for anyone if they don't give me any feeling to begin with? Why is it wrong for me to be without feeling? Why are you asking me to do something that nobody has done for me?” (Dattani, 50).

Tara is a diligent character who attempted to lead her life normally as it was, but that effort ultimately erupted in flames. The nervous system and brain are reshaped by traumatic experiences that linger in the minds of individuals who suffer from traumatic stress disorder decades after the incident has disappeared. The immediate responses of Tara to trauma are quite intricate and influenced by a wide range of factors, including Tara's previous history and the reactions of the larger community in which she lives.

In *30 Days in September*, Dattani has depicted the emotional and traumatic state of his protagonists. The storyline of Dattani's play, "*30 Days in September*," focuses on the psychological pressure that a mother and daughter are subjected to as a result of child abuse by a close family member. Vinay, the brother of Shantha, was the primary financial supporter for both Shantha and her daughter Mala. Vinay would gropingly seek Mala. This recurring incident caused Mala to develop chronic post-traumatic stress disorder. With the hope that it would all end one day, she tucked everything inside. However, she failed to handle it and hollered at Shantha. But both Shantha and Mala relied on Vinay, so Shantha would never voice her emotions or let her suffering be known. The subject of sexual abuse in families is dramatized in this play. When Mala's uncle Vinay started harassing her, Mala's life ended abruptly. Mala starts to blame herself for the dreadful events happening in her life. Even her mother was unable to provide her with any moral support. Mala considers herself responsible for the incident and tells,

“I thought that was the cure for my pain. That if I ate until I was stuffed, the pain would go away...You knew all along what was happening to me, I will not ever let you forget that” (Dattani, 24).

Mala had to deal with the long-term trauma of being the victim of frequent sexual harassment. “In *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Aggression in American Women's Fiction*, Horvitz explores the connections between political and personal trauma, gender and race relations, male violence against women and curiosity about intra psychic mechanisms, notable memory” (Horvitz, 2000).

In a session with her Psychiatrist, Mala shares her thoughts like,

“Mala: I do not know how to begin. Today is the 30th of September 2001, and my name is? I do not know if I want to say my name. I am sorry. I hope that is okay with you. I am unsure about this and many other things. But this ... this is the first time you see that I ... I know it is my entire fault. This is what I am meant for. It's not anybody's fault, except my own. Sometimes, I wish that my mother. (It gets to be difficult for her.) I am sorry but ... I can only tell you more if you turn this thing off.” (Dattani, 89)

“MALA: It doesn't matter now. I just have to learn to live with the pain.

SHANTA: Not just the pain. I remember, much as I was trying to forget, what I saw. Not when you were seven but when you were thirteen. (Gently.) Please don't misunderstand me, Mala. I remember, seeing you with my brother during the summer holidays. You were pushing yourself on him in the bedroom.” (Dattani, 27)

SHANTA: That is why I forget. I went to the kitchen to vomit. Then I prayed. I prayed for you Mala. (Pointing to the portrait.) That is what I was praying to. To our God, so He could send his Sudarshan Chakra to defend you, to defend us from the demon inside you, not outside you. But you wouldn't let me. You don't let me. (Dattani, 28)

Mala's mother Shantha knew Mala's distressing state, but never did anything to stop it, because both depended on Vinay for their bread.

The character Man mentioned below exists only to Mala in her pleasurable imagination, where she imagines a character within herself

“DEEPAK: You see? It wasn't that difficult.

MAN. Touch me here. [Mala withdraws her hand sharply, frightened.]

MAN. You don't love your uncle?

DEEPAK: What's wrong?

MAN. You don't love your uncle, hmmm?

DEEPAK: Try it one more time.

MAN. Quickly before someone sees you. Touch.

DEEPAK: Please for my sake.

MAN. You said you loved me in front of mummy and daddy. Come on! Show it! ...

MAN. If they hear you they will say you are a bad girl. This is our secret. (Like an order but in a whisper.) Don't Cry!" (Dattani 42- 43)

Through these incidents, Mala's traumatic stress kept on increasing and even her counselling sessions with the psychologist would be of no help in making her better.

"MALA. ... We were both struggling to survive but - I never acknowledged your struggle. ....

I just want to... I want to ask you whether you need my help. Please let me be of help. (Gently turning her mother's face towards her.) It's not your fault, mother. Just as it wasn't my fault. Please, tell me that you've forgiven me for blaming you. Please tell me that." (Collected Plays Vol. II 58)

This is how both Mala and Shantha reconcile with each other by the end of the play.

In, *Tara*, following a devastating betrayal episode, Tara began to realize that no one in her family genuinely loved her. On the other hand, Chandan, Tara's identical brother, felt intimidated and felt tremendously guilty. A stressful experience triggers one's logical brain to shut down, and the survival brain determines whether to fight, run away, freeze, or fawn to save their life. The brain stem, not the individual, dictates the person's survival response. Chandan blamed himself that Tara's life became complicated because of his presence. Tara stopped interacting with Chandan after that incident where Tara's legs were placed for Chandan, he felt trapped by his guilt. Both the children's lives were affected due to gender discrimination.

In a conversation between Roopa and Tara,

"Roopa: Sorry! Hello Uncle. Sorry! Am I disturbing you?

Tara: Not at all. The men in the house were deciding on whether they were going to go hunting while the women looked after the cave." (Dattani, 6)

Before this conversation, Mr. Patel would be insisting Chandan to accompany along with him to his office. But Chandan asks him to take Tara. But Mr. Patel got irritated suddenly and demands Chandan. The following conversation shows the gender discrimination enforced on both Tara and Chandan:

"Patel: Chandan.

Chanda: Ya

Patel: I was just thinking- it may be a god idea for you to come to the office with me.

Chandan: What for?

Patel: Just to get a feel of it.

Chandan: You can take Tara. She'll make a great businesswoman.

Patel (firm): Chandan, I think I must insist that you come.

Chandan: We'll both come with you.

Patel: No" (Dattani, 6)

The other incident that exhibits the gender discrimination is when Mr. Patel spots Chandan helping Bharathi in unraveling the knitting.

Patel: What are you two doing?

Chandan: Mummy's knitting and I'm helping her sort out her mistake.

Patel: Let Tara do it.

Chandan: It's okay.

Patel: Give it to her.

Chandan: Why?

Bharathi: It's all right, I'll manage. Leave it.

Chandan: I will roll all this and-

Patel: Chandan, Leave the damn thing alone!

Patel (to Bharathi): How dare you do this to him? Can't you look after the children? What did you do the whole day, huh? Watch video?

Bharathi: I can't think of things for them to do all the time!

Patel: But you can think of turning him into a sissy- teaching him to knit!

By the end of this conversation, Patel demands Chandan to come to office and yells at him stating that he can't see him spoiling at home. These two conversations clearly show the implication of gender discrimination imposed on the twins. Tara started to feel distanced after these incidents but after knowing about the operation incident Tara broke down. Both Patel and Bharathi fought between themselves discussing about the aftermath situation if Tara happens to know the truth behind the operation. Both Tara and Chandan being twins, they had three legs. Patel tells Tara that a scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl and in the surgery Dr. Thakkar replaced the leg to Chandan. Chandan had two legs for two days but later it was amputated because of the unusual nature of the operation. After knowing this Tara felt wronged.

"Tara stands alone in a spot, in a daze. Chandan moves to her and gestures to her to hold her hand. Tara turns away from him. Chandan is crushed" (Dattani, 59)

Even amid such circumstances, Chandan chose to move and become a writer. Unfortunately, Tara loses her life as a consequence of the trauma she experienced and also because of the failure of the operation. Depending on the intensity of the trauma, the traumatic outcome will fluctuate. Trauma is arguably the most human-caused source of misery that is shunned, discounted, rejected and misunderstood if left untreated. Tara was born healthy, and Chandan was born without legs. Mr. Patel informed the doctor, and they performed surgery on both Tara and Chandan. In Dattani's "*Tara*," Tara and Chandan undergo emotional trauma as a result of an upsetting incident that happened.

"In the book, "*Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioural Health Services*", the author indicated the fact that "the individual's sociocultural environment has a tremendous impact on their psychological responses to trauma, which can vary tremendously. Beyond the immediate emotional responses to the event, which manifest anger, fear, grief, and shame." (Chapter 3, Evans and Coccoma)". Thus, both Tara and Mala's sociocultural environment including their parents invaded the reality of their lives.

Pinki Virani in her book *Bitter Chocolate* states that "Patriarchy, power, penetration... are the factors that assist greatly in allowing a child to be sexually and physically, abused..." (Virani XX). This shows how patriarchy plays a major part in the lives of both Tara and Mala through their direct family.

#### 4. Discussions

In the play *Tara*, Tara isolates herself from others and reaches a stage of denial, which propels her to the next stage and exacts a price: her own life. Post-traumatic stress disorder is brought on by the aforementioned symptoms (PTSD). According to the symptoms the victims exhibit trauma that recovers in a new context. Mala and Tara both struggled with their day-to-day life. Both experienced the same harsh stressors, which disconnected them from the outside world and refused them to accept their fate. The inimical circumstances that they were subjected to made them victims to psychological stress and disorder. The key contributors to the trauma that developed in Tara were Mr. Patel and Mrs. Bharathi. The play's negative occurrences begin with gender prejudice. In *30 Days in September*, Shantha coerced Mala to remain quiet despite having experienced the trauma of mental and physical abuse. This play also portrays how Mala overcomes her trauma with the help of her psychiatrist and her boyfriend, Deepak. In *30 Days in September*, Deepak tries to help Mala by suggesting her to a psychologist and also met Mala's mother Shantha. But after meeting Vinay, Mala's Uncle Deepak understood the root cause of both Mala and her mother Shantha's problem. With the help of love and support, they both exposed Vinay and other shock news is revealed that Shantha too is the victim and being harassed by Vinay.

The difference in both the plays, *Tara* and *30 Days in September*, brings out how the children are subjected vulnerably to child abuse, which leads them to trauma. After the truth revealed about operation, both Tara and Mala had the probability of getting better or getting much worse. However, it is also in the hands of those who provide moral support and encourage them to speak out. Tara was in denial that the love showered on her was counterfeit and that she never mattered to her parents. Her trauma gotten worse at the end, which costed her life. But in the case of Mala, who got her moral support from her boyfriend, spoke out and arose for herself. This shows how trauma has both healing and destroying duality with the reference to Dattani's select plays. The abnormal behavior of the characters Tara, Mala and Shantha were decoded by highlighting the situations they encountered by the direct family members, and they were silenced. The reason behind their trauma has not been identified and neglected love, understanding and patriarchal rule, gender discrimination and societal unwritten norms. Since Tara, Shantha, and Mala, three different victims in these two plays, have dealt with the same situation in different ways, the plays give us something to think about and contemplate while analyzing the problems of post-traumatic stress disorder with child sexual abuse.

## 5. Results

Recurring symptoms can interfere with a person's normal tasks. The person's ideas and feelings may be the source of the symptoms. In "*30 Days in September*," Mala aches from the trauma of her uncle Vinay's sexual assault. As Vinay provides for her family financially, Mala is unable to disclose. Mala experienced similar terrible situations repeatedly, and as a result, her normal life was disrupted. The plays show how a traumatic incident can shatter bonds between oneself and others by posing fundamental questions about moral principles and interpersonal relationships. The characters' Tara and Mala were the victims of their past suffering and painful experiences. Sexual assault, workplace discrimination, police violence, victimization, marital abuse, and particularly early events are frequently associated with psychoanalytic trauma. Violence in early life is associated with abusive behavior later in life. The most critical thing to keep in mind is that different people respond to similar situations in different ways. In the Freudian method healing might be affected through the recall of repressed childhood memories (Morgan, King, and Weirz & Schopler 580-581). So, the counseling sessions trigger the painful experience within Mala.

Mala and Tara's families drove them to traumatic experiences. As a result, they dwell in continual hopelessness, misery and low self-esteem. "The man quickly enters their area. There is something very furtive in his eye movement and a sense of conspiracy in his tone of voice ... He exists only for Mala and not for Deepak." (Dattani, 42) The silenced victims, Tara, Mala and Shantha's emotional responses persist throughout their lives. People who experience trauma will have an implicit recollection of everything that occurs around them. Shantha was also subjected to sexual harassment by her brother, who was a source of support for both Shantha and her daughter Mala. As a result of being coerced into this misconception, Shantha persuaded herself that if they moved out and led independent lives, their lives would be more difficult. Their ongoing emotional and psychological traumas will eventually manifest as life-threatening acts or behavior.

Trauma theory was propounded by Freud to find the reason behind mental health issues faced by women. Women were subjugated to rape, which ended up changing their normal behavior forever. "Kirby Farrell states that trauma is both a clinical concept and... a cultural trope" (Farrell 14). "In her work "Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction" (2002), Vickroy distinguishes "trauma narratives" as fictional narratives that help readers to understand traumatic experiences" (1). Both the plays by Dattani show how the family members exploit the lives of children and created lifelong trauma to the children. Both Mr. and Mrs. Patel knew the risk they were planning but still decided to carry on with it. In "*30 Days in September*", Tragically, Mala condemns herself for being the abuser,

"I know it is all my fault really . . . It must be. I must have asked for it . . . Somehow, I just seem to be made for it . . . It's not anybody's fault, except my own" ((Dattani, 9).

In "*Tara*", the protagonist Tara's life gets complicated because of the emotional attack she received because of her parents. Dattani's conceptualization of trauma in his plays has been portrayed vibrantly.

## 6. Conclusion

"Perpetrators often frighten children into silence and secrecy by threatening to harm them, another family member, or a favorite pet, and/or they use their position of authority to convince their victims that the situation is "normal", and the victim has a duty to obey the adult." (Kinneer 3)

The above lines reflect the lives of Tara and Mala. In *30 Days in September*, Mala was threatened and silenced by the perpetrators. Because the adults drag the child into a life of sexual abuse, which hinders their development towards their future, the child's psychological development is harmed. Children who have no perception of the outside world are subjected to such devastating experiences in life at such a young age. But with the proper help and love, trauma victims can truly recover from their hardship. The consequences of child abuse on the victim's mind are extremely damaging. Depression and anxiety retard the victim's brain growth and pull them deeper into a pit of despair. According to Sigmund Freud, "What we describe as our 'character' is based on the memory-traces of our impressions; and, moreover, the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us those of our earliest youth". (Freud 539-540). Children when growing up by facing significant illness, invasive medical procedures, domestic violence, sexual, physical, or verbal abuse, and neglect play a major role in developing psychological trauma. Through such symptoms, trauma can be identified, and they can be treated. Hiding the truth only harms the mental health of the victims. According to the facts presented above, the author has crafted his characters to share traits including a lack of hope, clarity, unjustified guilt, and depression. The goal of the study is to deepen our knowledge of how trauma affects people and how we should embrace them for who they are. The academic community owes it to society to elevate the understanding of trauma as well as other mental health conditions like anxiety and depression. The paper identifies and maps Mahesh Dattani's writing style from the standpoint of trauma in literature to provide a fresh perspective on the academic investigation of Dattani's theory of trauma. Thus, it can be concluded from the words of Turmaud, "One of the best tools we have in eliminating the insidious stigmatization of trauma is awareness. As the misconceptions are named for what they are, they can then be overtly challenged within individuals, systems, and cultures, and survivors can be better supported both by themselves and others."

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